The Interpersonal Communication Book

SIXTEENTH EDITION

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GLOBAL EDITION

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Pearson

(it's in the report) and statement 9 is false (the drawer was opened). But all other statements are inferences and should have been marked "?". Review the remaining eight statements to see why you cannot be certain that any of them are either true or false.

Table 4.4 Differences between Factual and Inferential Statements

Inferential Statements	Factual Statements
May be made at any time	May be made only after observation
Go beyond what has been observed	Are limited to what has been observed
May be made by anyone	May be made only by the observer
May be about any time—past, present, or future	May be about only the past or the present
Involve varying degrees of probability	Approach certainty
Are not subject to verifiable standards	Are subject to verifiable, scientific standards

Discriminate Among: Avoid Indiscrimination

Nature seems to abhor sameness at least as much as vacuums because nowhere in the universe can you find identical entities. Everything is unique. Language, however, provides common nouns—such as *teacher, student, friend, enemy, war, politician, liberal*, and the like—that may lead you to focus on similarities. Such nouns can lead you to group together all teachers, all students, and all friends and perhaps divert attention from the uniqueness of each individual, object, and event.

The misevaluation known as **indiscrimination**—a form of stereotyping—occurs when you focus on classes of individuals, objects, or events and fail to see that each is unique and needs to be looked at individually. Indiscrimination can be seen in statements such as these:

- He's just like the rest of them: lazy, stupid, a real slob.
- I really don't want another ethnic on the board of directors. One is enough for me.
- Read a romance novel? I read one when I was 16. That was enough to convince me.

A useful antidote to indiscrimination is the extensional device called the *index*, a mental subscript that identifies each individual in a group as an individual, even though all members of the group may be covered by the same label. For example, when you think and talk of an individual politician as just a "politician," you may fail to see the uniqueness in this politician and the differences between this particular politician and other politicians. However, when you think with the index—when you think not of politician but of politician^1 or politician^2 or politician^3—you're less likely to fall into the trap of indiscrimination and more likely to focus on the differences among politicians. The same is true with members of cultural, national, or religious groups; when you think of Iraqi^1 and Iraqi^2, you'll be reminded that not all Iraqis are the same. The more you discriminate among individuals covered by the same label, the less likely you are to discriminate against any group.

Talk about the Middle: Avoid Polarization

Polarization, often referred to as the fallacy of either/or, is the tendency to look at the world and to describe it in terms of extremes—good or bad, positive or negative, healthy or sick, brilliant or stupid, rich or poor, and so on. Polarized statements come in many forms; for example:

- After listening to the evidence, I'm still not clear who the good guys are and who the bad guys are.
- Well, are you for us or against us?
- College had better get me a good job. Otherwise, this has been a big waste of time.

Most people exist somewhere between the extremes of good and bad, healthy and sick, brilliant and stupid, rich and poor. Yet there seems to be a strong tendency to view only the extremes and to categorize people, objects, and events in terms of these polar opposites.

You can easily demonstrate this tendency by filling in the opposites for each of the following words:

				Opposite
tall	_____	:_____	:_____	_____
heavy	_____	:_____	:_____	_____
strong	_____	:_____	:_____	_____
happy	_____	:_____	:_____	_____
legal	_____	:_____	:_____	_____

Filling in the opposites should have been relatively easy and quick. The words should also have been fairly short. Further, if various different people supplied the opposites, there would be a high degree of agreement among them. Now try to fill in the middle positions with words meaning, for example, "midway between tall and short," "midway between heavy and light," and so on. Do this before reading any further.

These midway responses (compared to the opposites) were probably more difficult to think of and took you more time. The responses should also have been long words or phrases of several words. And different people would probably agree less on these midway responses than on the opposites.

This exercise clearly illustrates the ease with which we can think and talk in opposites and the difficulty we have in thinking and talking about the middle. But recognize that the vast majority of cases exist between extremes. Don't allow the ready availability of extreme terms to obscure the reality of what lies in between (Read, 2004).

In some cases, of course, it's legitimate to talk in terms of two values. For example, either this thing you're holding is a book or it isn't. Clearly, the classes "book" and "not-book" include all possibilities. There is no problem with this kind of statement. Similarly, you may say that a student either will pass this course or will not, as these two categories include all the possibilities.

You create problems, however, when you use this either/or form in situations in which it's inappropriate; for example, "The supervisor is either for us or against us." The two choices simply don't include all possibilities: The supervisor may be for us in some things and against us in others, or may be neutral. Right now there is a tendency to group people into pro- and anti- categories on abortion, taxes, gay rights, masks, social distancing and just about every important political or social issue, with some people entirely and totally supportive of one side and others entirely and totally supportive of the other side. But clearly these extremes do not include all possibilities, and polarized thinking actually prevents us from entertaining the vast middle ground that exists on all such issues.

Update Messages: Avoid Static Evaluation

Language changes very slowly, especially when compared to the rapid pace at which people and things change. When you retain an evaluation of a person, despite the inevitable changes in the person, you're engaging in **static evaluation**.

Alfred Korzybski (1933) used an interesting illustration in this connection: In a tank there is a large fish and many small fish that are its natural food source. Given freedom in the tank, the large fish will eat the small fish. After some time, the tank is partitioned,

with the large fish on one side and the small fish on the other, divided only by glass. For a time, the large fish will try to eat the small fish but will fail; each time it tries, it will knock into the glass partition. After some time it will learn that trying to eat the small fish means difficulty, and it will no longer go after them. Now, however, the partition is removed, and the small fish swim all around the big fish. But the big fish does not eat them and in fact will die of starvation while its natural food swims all around. The large fish has learned a pattern of behavior, and even though the actual territory has changed, the map remains static.

While you would probably agree that everything is in a constant state of flux, the relevant question is whether you act as if you know this. Do you act in accordance with the notion of change instead of just accepting it intellectually? Do you treat your little sister as if she were 10 years old, or do you treat her like the 20-year-old woman she has become? Your evaluations of yourself and others need to keep pace with the rapidly changing real world. Otherwise you'll be left with attitudes and beliefs—static evaluations—about a world that no longer exists.

To guard against static evaluation, use an extensional device called the date: mentally date your statements and especially your evaluations. Remember that Gerry Smith^{2019} is not Gerry Smith^{2022}, academic abilities^{2019} are not academic abilities^{2022}. T. S. Eliot, in *The Cocktail Party*, said that "what we know of other people is only our memory of the moments during which we knew them. And they have changed since then . . . . at every meeting we are meeting a stranger."

These six guidelines, which are summarized in Table 4.5, will not solve all problems in verbal communication—but they will help you to align your language more accurately with the real world, the world of words and not words; infinite complexity; facts and inferences; sameness and difference; extremes and middle ground; and, perhaps most important, constant change.

Table 4.5   IN A NUTSHELL Essential Verbal Message Guidelines

Effective	Ineffective
Extensionalize: Distinguish between the way people, objects, and events are talked about and what exists in reality; the word is not the thing.	**Intensionalize:** Treat words and things as the same; respond to things as they are talked about rather than as they exist.
Avoid allness: No one can know or say all about anything; always assume there is more to be said, more to learn.	**Commit allness:** Assume you know everything that needs to be known or that all that can be said has been said.
Distinguish between facts and inferences and respond to them differently.	**Confuse facts and inferences:** Respond to inferences as if they were facts.
Discriminate among items covered by the same label.	**Indiscriminately treat** all items (people, objects, and events) covered by the same label similarly.
Talk about the middle, where the vast majority of cases exist.	**Polarize:** View and talk about only the extremes; ignore the middle.
Recognize change: Regularly update your messages, meanings, evaluations, and beliefs.	**Statically evaluate:** Fail to recognize the inevitable change in things and people.

Summary of Concepts

This chapter introduced the verbal message system and identified some basic principles concerning how the verbal message system works and how it can be used more effectively.

Principles of Verbal Messages

4.1 Paraphrase the principles of verbal messages.

1. Messages are packaged; verbal and nonverbal signals interact to produce one (ideally) unified message. Six major ways nonverbal messages can interact with verbal messages are to (1) accent, or emphasize a verbal message; (2) complement, or add nuances of meaning; (3) contradict, or deny the verbal message; (4) control, or manage the flow of communication; (5) repeat, or restate the message; and (6) substitute, or take the place of a verbal message.

2. Message meanings are in people—in people's thoughts and feelings, not just in their words.

3. Meanings are both denotative and connotative. Denotation is the dictionary meaning of a word or sentence. Connotation is the personal meaning of a word or sentence. Denotative meaning is relatively objective; connotative meaning is highly subjective.

4. Messages vary in abstraction; they vary from very specific and concrete to highly abstract and general.

5. Messages may refer to things and people in the real world or to words themselves (that is, be metacommunication).

6. Messages vary in politeness—from rude to extremely polite—and may be viewed in terms of maintaining positive and negative face. Variations in what is considered polite among cultures are often great.

7. Messages can be onymous, in which the sender is identified, or anonymous, in which the sender is unidentified.

8. Messages can deceive; some messages are lies.

9. Messages vary in assertiveness. Standing up for one's own rights without infringing on the rights of others is the goal of most assertive communication.

Confirmation and Disconfirmation

4.2 Distinguish between confirmation and disconfirmation; define *racism*, *ageism*, *heterosexism*, and *sexism*; and provide examples of appropriate cultural identifiers.

10. Disconfirmation is communication that ignores another, that denies the other person's definition of self. Confirmation expresses acknowledgment and acceptance of others and avoids racist, ageist, heterosexist, and sexist expressions that are disconfirming.

11. Appropriate cultural identifiers are essential for effective interpersonal communication.

Verbal Message Competence

4.3 Explain the guidelines for avoiding the major misuses of verbal language: intensional orientation, allness, fact–inference confusion, indiscrimination, polarization, and static evaluation.

12. Extensionalize: the word is not the thing. Avoid intensional orientation, the tendency to view the world in the way it's talked about or labeled. Instead, respond to things first; look for the labels second.

13. See the individual; avoid allness, our tendency to describe the world in extreme terms that imply we know all or are saying all there is to say. To combat allness, remind yourself that you can never know all or say all about anything; use a mental and sometimes verbal "et cetera."

14. Distinguish between facts and inferences, and act differently depending on whether the message is factual or inferential.

15. Discriminate among. Avoid indiscrimination, the tendency to group unique individuals or items because they're covered by the same term or label. To combat indiscrimination, recognize uniqueness and mentally index each individual in a group (teacher^1, teacher^2).

16. Talk with middle terms; avoid polarization, the tendency to describe the world in terms of extremes or polar opposites. To combat polarization, use middle terms and qualifiers.

17. Update messages regularly; nothing is static. Avoid static evaluation, the tendency to describe the world in static terms, denying constant change. To combat static evaluation, recognize the inevitability of change; date statements and evaluations, realizing, for example, that Gerry Smith^{2018} is not Gerry Smith^{2022}.

Summary of Skills

In addition to the chapter concepts, this chapter also covered several interpersonal skills. Here are listed some of these important skills. As you read over the list, place a check in front of those you feel you'd like to work on and add any other skills you think are important and want to polish.

_____ **1. Meanings.** Look for meanings in people, not just in words.

_____ **2. Connotative meanings.** Clarify your connotative meanings if you have any concern that your listeners might misunderstand you; as a listener, ask questions if you have doubts about the speaker's connotations.

_____ **3. Abstractions.** Use both abstract and concrete language when describing or explaining.

_____ **4. Politeness.** Be careful of messages that will be perceived as impolite, messages that attack a person's positive or negative face.

_____ **5. Deception.** Be alert to messages that seek to deceive but careful in reading signs of deception where there may be no deception involved.

_____ **6. Confirmation.** When you wish to be confirming, acknowledge (verbally and/or nonverbally) others in your group and their contributions.

_____ **7. Disconfirming language.** Avoid racist, heterosexist, ageist, and sexist language, which is disconfirming and insulting and invariably creates communication barriers.

_____ **8. Cultural identifiers.** Use cultural identifiers that are sensitive to the desires of others; when appropriate, make clear the cultural identifiers you prefer.

_____ **9. Intensional orientation.** Avoid intensional orientation. Look to people and things first and to labels second.

_____ **10. Allness.** Avoid allness statements; they invariably misstate the reality and will often offend the other person.

_____ **11. Facts and inferences.** Distinguish facts (verifiably true past events) from inferences (guesses or hypotheses), and act on inferences with tentativeness.

_____ **12. Indiscrimination.** Treat each situation and each person as unique (when possible) even when they're covered by the same label. Index key concepts.

_____ **13. Polarization.** Avoid thinking and talking in extremes by using middle terms and qualifiers. But remember that too many qualifiers may make you appear unsure of yourself.

_____ **14. Dating statements.** Date your statements to avoid thinking of the world as static and unchanging. Reflect the inevitability of change in your messages.

Key Terms

These are the key terms discussed in this chapter. If you're in doubt about the definition of any of these terms, review the concept in this chapter, look up the definitions in the glossary at the end of the book, or search the term in the index.

abstraction	extensional orientation	onymous messages
ageism	fact–inference confusion	polarization
ageist language	gender fluidity	politeness
allness	heterosexist language	positive face
anonymous messages	indiscrimination	racist language
assertiveness	intensional orientation	rejection
confirmation	lying	sexist language
connotation	metacommunication	static evaluation
cultural identifiers	microaggressions	transgender
denotation	negative face	verbal messages
disconfirmation	non-binary	

Nonverbal Messages

Nonverbal messages come in lots of different forms. *Learning to use and respond appropriately to these nonverbal messages will increase your interpersonal effectiveness.*

Chapter Topics

Principles of Nonverbal Communication

Channels of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

5.1 Explain the principles of nonverbal messages.

5.2 Explain the channels through which nonverbal messages are sent and received.

5.3 Identify the competencies for effectively encoding and decoding nonverbal messages.